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AN EXAMINATION OF ADJECTIVAL FORMS
IN THE CAKCHIQUEL LANGUAGE

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In the Mayan language Cakchiquel, there are several different ways to form an adjective. The grammars of the language have only partially displayed the full array of Cakchiquel adjectives, and have seldom attempted any semantic discussion of them.

The purpose of this paper is to present all the Cakchiquel adjectival forms and discuss their semantic interrelationships.

For the purpose of this explanation, I have categorized Cakchiquel adjectives into four basic classes: (1) regular, (2) distinctive, (3) emphatic, and (4) stative.

I. REGULAR

The regular adjectives are found in both attributive and predicative positions. They are the most frequently used adjectives and carry with them no special semantic meaning.

Flurality is generally inferred from the context of the sentence, although it may be specified by the insertion of the distributive particle taq between the adjective and the noun:

içel winëq	(evil person or people)
içel taq winëq	(evil people)
kow ab'ëx	(hard rock or rocks)
kow taq ab'ëx	(hard rocks)

In addition, there are two adjectives in this class which have a special plural form:

	singular	plural
large	nim	nima'q
small	č'uti'n	č'uti'q

II. DISTINCTIVE

Distinctive adjectives occur in attributive position, and are formed by adding a suffix of either -a or -i (see table I). The semantic consequences of the distinctive adjectival form in opposition to the regular adjectival form can be explained

using the theory of markedness. This notion of markedness implies that in a given opposition, one form is the unmarked, or general form, and the other is more marked, or specific. The distinctive adjectival form in Cakchiquel has a more restricted lexical meaning than the regular form. A nim xay, for example, is a big house, whereas a nima xay is some special kind of big building, such as a courthouse. The distinctive form of the adjectival root č'ut (small) is restricted in meaning, such as in č'uti te'ex (aunt).¹ In some cases, the distinctive form may function as a diminutive, often showing endearment, such as the -ito or -ita suffixes in Spanish; a č'uti ač'in is an "hombrecito". When modifying colors, the distinctive form reflects a change in the tone or hue of the color: səq is white, while saqa is silver; q'eq is black, and q'eqa is jet black; kəq is red, but kaqa is crimson; rəš is green/blue, but raša is jade; q'ən is yellow, while q'ana is gold.

Table I

	Regular Adjective (unmarked)	Distinctive Adjective (marked)
large	nim	nim-a
small	č'ut [i'r]	č'ut-i
white	səq	saq-a
black	q'eq	q'eq-a
red	kəq	kaq-a
green	rəš	raš-a
yellow	q'ən	q'an-a
ripe	čəq'	čaqa'-a
old	ri'x	rix-a

Roman Jakobson has shown that marked forms are usually more complex or longer than unmarked forms.² We would therefore expect distinctive Cakchiquel adjectives to be phonetically more complex than regular adjectives.

Notice that č'uti'n (small) takes the -i suffix, while the others take the -a suffix. To explain this, I would like to take the theory of markedness one step further to show hierarchies among adjectival pairs.³ Nim (large) and č'uti'n (small) are at opposite poles of an adjectival pair -- large in opposition to small. In the pairs big/little, deep/shallow, and wide/narrow, the first member is the unmarked, or general adjective, and the second is more marked or restricted. The unmarked item in the pair tends to be more frequent than its marked counterpart and tends to carry

a more basic meaning. For example, when asking about the size of an object, we would normally ask how big it is and not how little it is. "Big" is the unmarked item. It tends to be more frequent than "little", and has a more basic meaning than "little." When referring to a body of water, we would ask how deep it is, and not how shallow it is, unless, of course, we were emphasizing its shallowness, in which case we would be using the adjective in a marked or restricted sense. Therefore, we would expect nim (large) to be the unmarked, and more frequent in Cakchiquel, and č'uti'n (small) to be the more marked. In April 1979, I presented a paper at the Deseret Language and Linguistic Society symposium wherein I used the theory of markedness to explain the use of the -a' and -i' plural noun markers in Cakchiquel.⁴ I concluded that a was the general, or unmarked, and i was the more marked. If this distinction of marked/unmarked holds true in Cakchiquel adjectives, we would expect a to continue to be the unmarked, and i to be the more marked. Hence, we would expect that the stem nim- (being the unmarked adjective) would take the -a suffix in the distinctive form, and likewise č'ut- (being the more marked adjective) would take the -i suffix.

III. EMPHATIC

Emphatic adjectives occur in attributive position, as do distinctive adjectives, and are formed by adding one of two suffixes: -alëx or -ilëx (see table II). The semantic consequence of this form is that the adjective is more emphatic. An uç ač'in is a good man, while an uçilëx ač'in is a very good man.

We may continue to apply the theory of markedness in explaining the alternation of the a and i which we see surface again in the -alëx and -ilëx suffixes. If the i is the more marked of the two, we would assume that it carries with it a more restricted lexical meaning. The adjectives shown in table II all take the -ilëx suffix because of the semantic value inherent in this form. That is, uçilëx is VERY good, içelilëx is VERY bad, and šafilëx is VERY thin. Being an extreme, all adjectives of this class have a more restricted usage and are found in more specialized cases. We would therefore expect them to take the i (-ilëx) more often than the a (-alëx). The only emphatic forms, in fact, which ever take the -alëx suffix are those which also have a distinctive form of the suffix -a (see table III).

Table II

	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Emphatic</u>
good	uɕ	uɕ-ilëx
bad	iɕel	iɕel-ilëx
thin	šaš	šaš-ilëx
thick	pim	pim-ilëx
acidic	č'ëm	č'am-ilëx
cold	tew	tew-ilëx
slick	liq'	liq'-ilëx
clean	č'axč'ox	č'axč'ox-ilëx
humble	č'uč'ux	č'uč'ux-ilëx
hard	k'ayew	k'ayew-ilëx
skinny	b'aq	b'aq-ilëx
fat	ti'ox	ti'ox-ilëx
crazy	moš	moš-ilëx
just	čox	čox-ilëx

Table III

	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Distinctive</u>	<u>Emphatic</u>
large	nim	nim-a	nim-alëx (or nim-ilëx)
white	sëq	saq-a	saq-alëx (or saq-ilëx)
black	q'eq	q'eq-a	q'eq-alëx (or q'eq-ilëx)
red	këq	kaq-a	kaq-alëx (or kaq-ilëx)
green	rëš	raš-a	raš-alëx (or raš-ilëx)
yellow	q'ën	q'an-a	q'an-alëx (or q'an-ilëx)
ripe	čëq'	čaq'-a	čaq'-alëx (or čaq'-ilëx)
old	ri'x	rix-a	rix-alëx (or rix-ilëx)

The a from the distinctive form influences the formation of the emphatic adjective. The box in table IV illustrates this condition.

Table IV

from emphatic
form:

		-ilëx (eg. uçilëx)
from distinctive form	a (eg. nima)	-ilëx -alëx (eg. nimalëx or nimalëx)

In the upper right box, we see the influence of the pure -ilëx suffix that we would expect from the semantic quality of the emphatic adjective. We also see another influencing factor in the lower left box. This is the a carrying through from the distinctive adjectival form. Because of this dual influence, we find that either suffix can and does exist in these cases.

Those adjectives which do not have a distinctive form of the suffix -a can only take the suffix -ilëx in the emphatic form. Moreover, since -ilëx is the more dominant of the two suffixes, representing the emphatic semantic value of this adjectival form, it is taking over the place of the less frequent -alëx.

IV. STATIVE

The fourth class of Cakchiquel adjectives I will call stative. Statives can be realized in Mayan grammar as transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, and adjectives. This paper focuses on the adjectival form, which in this case describes the state or position of the object being modified. Table V shows the four stative adjectival forms.

Table V

For verbs with vowels a,e,i,o:

Sample verb: -xeq-
(to spread out)

	<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
less		
intense	xeq-el	xeqex-ox
more		
intense	xeqex-ik	xeqex-ëq

For verbs with vowel u:

Sample verb: -xup-
(to be face down)

	<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
less		
intense	xup-ul	xup-uø
more		
intense	xupux-ik	xupux-ëq

The first form is the most common and is the past participle of the verb with which it is associated. It consists of the stem of the verb and a suffix of the form vowel+l (the vowel being the same as the vowel in the stem):

	verb	singular
to get wet	-č'eq-	č'eq-el
to hang	-ø'eq-	ø'eq-el
to grind	-pač'-	pač'-al
to twist	-šot-	šot-ol
to lean	-luk-	luk-ul

The three remaining forms are chiastic, in that they involve an ordered reversal of the original sequence of sounds of the stem of the verb. For example, a sequence of consonants and vowels C1 V1 C2 in the stem of the verb would produce a chiastic stem of C1 V1 C2 V1 C1. This inverted repetition of sounds suggests an intensification in the adjective.⁵

The plural of the first form consists of the chiastic stem of the verb, plus the suffix -ox (except where the vowel in the singular form is u, then the suffix -uø is added to the regular verb stem).⁶

	verb	singular	plural
to get wet	-č'eq-	č'eq-el	č'eqeč'-ox
to hang	-č'eq-	č'eq-el	č'eqeč'-ox
to grind	-pač'-	pač'-al	pač'ap-ox
to twist	-šot-	šot-ol	šotoš-ox
to lean	-luk-	luk-ul	luk-uč'

The second, and more intense, adjectival forms are made by adding the suffix -ik to the chiastic stem to form the singular and the suffix -ëq to the chiastic stem to form the plural.⁷

	verb	singular	plural
to make round	-set	setes-ik	setes-ëq
to be pointed	-čup-	čupuč'-ik	čupuč'-ëq
to roll up	-b'ol	b'olob'-ik	b'olob'-ëq
to lean	-luk-	lukul-ik	lukul-ëq
to mound	-b'ux-	b'uxub'-ik	b'uxub'-ëq
to be bald	-č'ën	č'anač'-ik	č'anač'-ëq
to wad up	-b'oč' ..	b'oč'ob'-ik	b'oč'ob'-ëq
to be loose	-tob'-	tob'ot-ik	tob'ot-ëq
to squash	-pič'	pič'ip-ik	pič'ip-ëq

In this paper I have appealed to tradition, gleaning pieces here and there from the works of Cakchiquel grammarians of the past. Unfortunately, the great insights of these ancient masters have been largely left in the shadows. In a recent book by Roman Jakobson, he states that in modern linguistic research, the inquirer must "gain a widened scope and deeper insight by familiarizing himself with questions and working hypotheses raised in linguistics of the near and remote past and by testing them on the rich materials gathered and accumulated since."⁸ Such a renewal is fruitful in giving a unified view of the adjectival forms of the Cakchiquel language.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The following minimal pairs should clarify the point here:
č'uti tata'ax (uncle), č'uti'n tata'ax (small father);
č'uti k'axol (nephew), č'uti'n k'axol (small son); č'uti
mi'al (niece), č'uti'n mi'al (small daughter).
- ² Consider the hierarchy of these degrees of adjectives:
 high/higher/highest. As they become progressively more
 marked, they also acquire more phonetic complexity. This
 is also true with male/female and author/authoress. See
 Jakobson, Roman, "Quest For the Essence of Language,"
Selected Writtings II. Mouton: The Hague, Paris, 1971,
 p. 352.
- ³ Greenberg, Joseph. Language Universals with Special
Reference to Feature Hierarchies, Mouton: The Hague,
 Paris, pp. 52-53.
- ⁴ Richman, Larry L. "The Semantic Value of the -a' and the
 -i' Noun Plurals in Cakchiquel", Deseret Language and
Linguistic Society Symposium 1979, Brigham Young
 University: Provo, Utah, 1979, pp. 57-63. Also published
 in Notes on Linguistics 13, Summer Institute of
 Linguistics: Dallas, Texas, January 1980, pp. 31-36.

A brief summary of the conclusions of that paper:

Cakchiquel nouns may be pluralized with the addition
 of one of two suffixes: -a' or -i'. Using the notion
 of markedness to explain the use of these two
 suffixes would imply that a hierarchical relationship
 exists between the two poles of the opposition -a'
 vs. -i': -a' being the unmarked, or general plural
 marker, and its oppositional counterpart, -i', the
 more specific form. The marked suffix -i' carries
 with it an additional unit of specific semantic
 information in contrast to the unmarked suffix -a'
 which remains neutral. In this opposition, both the
 -a' and the -i' share the notion of plurality, but
 the -i', being the more marked of the two suffixes,
 often signals some deviation from the norm, and is
 always found in more restricted contexts.

- ⁵ Chiasmus also appears in Cakchiquel verb forms and has the
 same effect of intensification.
- ⁶ Rosales?, R.P.Fr. Carlos J. Gramatica del idioma
cachiquel, Guatemala, C.A., 1748, pp. 18-19.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Jakobson, Roman. The Framework of Language. Michigan
 Studies in the Humanities: Michigan, 1980, pp. 40-41.